

RUSSIA AND THE WEST IN IRAN

was embarrassing for the Tashkent Bolsheviks to face there a nationalist center. Consequently they turned their attention to Kokand first. An expeditionary force was dispatched from Tashkent to subdue Kokand in February, 1918. The Kokand nationalists put up resistance but were unprepared to meet an armed invasion at such an early stage of their political organization. Besides, the Bolsheviks used troops who in military experience possessed an uncontested superiority over the loosely knit nationalist Moslem forces: they were composed mainly of former prisoners of war, taken by tsarist armies and interned in Turkestan—Germans, Czechs, Magyars, and Austrians. These prisoners were being released by the Bolsheviks as a result of the truce between the Soviet government and the Central Powers; a Communist agitation among them gained a number of adherents for the Bolshevik cause; and even those who were not converted to Communism were willing to fight for the Russian Communists, because, as was suggested to them, they expected to fight their way out of Russia toward their native countries. Kokand was conquered and, according to a British observer,

was laid waste with a ruthlessness that would have surprised a Mongol conqueror of the middle ages, and more than fourteen thousand of the people were massacred. The mosques and shrines were desecrated and defamed, the fine library of Mohammedan literature was burnt, and a blockade was instituted by which the remaining inhabitants were debarred from receiving grain from adjacent provinces, their own supplies having already been commandeered. Over nine hundred thousand people are said to have perished from this famine.⁸

Thus a victory was won, a nationalist "bourgeois"

center was
smashed; but politically this reckless step was an
error, because the
news about the Kokand massacre spread widely over
the whole of
the Mohammedan Orient and caused not a little
embarrassment to
Moscow in its dealings with Moslems.⁹ Soviet sources
tried to mini-

⁸ Quoted from Lt.-Colonel P. T. Etherton, *In the Heart of Asia* (Boston and New York, 1926), pp. 153 ff. The description of the Kokand massacre is also contained in Sir George Macartney, "Bolshevism as I Saw It at Tashkent in 1918," *Journal of the Central Asian Society*, VII (1920), n and m, 42-58.

⁹ According to A. L. P. Dennis (*op. tit.*, p. 247), "This was later sorely to embarrass Soviet leaders at the Baku Conference of Eastern peoples."